Dining with Elders

The Chinese and the Americans are very different culture-wise. When I arrived in America, I was especially surprised by the Western table manners. Not only are they more familiar and friendly with their elders, but they are also, maybe the tiniest bit, rather disrespectful. Maybe their definition of respect is different than ours, but the sudden and extreme twist was a bit shocking.. The Chinese take caution to respect their elders at all times, making sure that the elders feel as important as they are. For example, if there is an elder present at a meal, it is important to stay standing before the elders sit first. This kind of culture is one I can personally related to. With my family's Korean ways of dining, it is considered rude to sit before the elder, or to lift one's spoon because the elder does. The elder, or the head of my family, my dad, will take the first bite of food before my sister or I could. Naturally, the best or the finest food would be reserved for the elders. People usually prefer round tables to the rectangular tables in the east. When sitting at a rounded table, the elders have the seat facing the best directions. When sitting at a rectangular table, the elders will sit at the shortest side, considered to be the 'head' of the table. The Chinese form of dining is very different than the Americans'. On America, one will have their own separate plate of food, complete with side dishes and such. However, in China (or most other Eastern countries), people subsist mainly on rice, and a bowl of rice will be the only thing in front of them (if they were eating rice). Other foods, arranged in the middle of the table, are there to compliment the rice, or add flavor to. The main dishes, when prepared to hold some kind of decorative form, must face the head of the table, where the elder sits, showing virtue.

Source: (<http://www.travelchinaguide.com/intro/cuisine.htm>)  
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